Then the Commander of the Military District ordered the Cossacks to defend the Tauride Palace. I do not know how large a force he intended to use, but only a platoon, some twenty horsemen with a horse-drawn piece of light artillery, obeyed his order. Had we known of this expedition, we would have countermanded the order at once. There was not the slightest chance that a small horse detachment could pierce the ring of rioting regiments and crowds of armed workers around the Tauride Palace. Indeed, as soon as the Cossacks reached the central avenues overflowing with excited armed crowds, they met with deadly fire. Several men were wounded, a few were killed, and the rest of the detachment fled, abandoning the cannon. The commanding officer of the expedition, a lad of eighteen or nineteen, reached the palace without his side arms and the insignia on his uniform. He was hysterical, crying like a child, and blamed the Executive Committee for the death of his men. I felt very sorry for the youngster, but all I could do for him was to use shock treatment.

"Did we ask you to lead your platoon to our rescue?" I shouted.

"I got the order from my superiors. You had asked them."

"Then listen to what I am going to say. Only an idiot could have sent a platoon on horseback through streets full of foot soldiers with rifles and machine guns. We would not hesitate to use troops that could really fight, but we would rather let the mob ransack the palace than disgrace ourselves by luring a handful of practically unarmed men into a trap."

The palace was surrounded by a disorderly and openly hostile crowd of workers and soldiers when a delegation from the First Armored Division appeared. Its spokesman said to me, "You called on us this morning. Do you need us for a demonstration or for fighting?"

I replied, "If all you can offer is a demonstration, we don't need you."

"Then count on our tanks," he said. "Count on us!" the other members of the delegation echoed.

We drove to the division's barracks. The men, an unexpectedly small group, were assembled in the garage among their tanks, which looked like elephants in stalls. I told the soldiers that the All-Russian Executive Committee was encircled by a rioting mob and other crowds were moving toward the palace, but that we would not yield to threats. An attack was possible at any moment, and I asked, "Will you defend the Executive Committee?"

They replied as one, "We will."

The commander of the division stepped forward and barked orders, "Drivers and gunners, man your cars! Follow me with lids closed! Close formation! Ready for action!"

I took a seat in the narrow compartment in his tank. It carried a